

# Statement by Rep. Jerrold Nadler on Fifth Anniversary of Terrorist Attacks Launched Against the United States on September 11, 2001

Tuesday, 12 September 2006

Mr. Speaker, it is all together fitting that we adopt a resolution commemorating the fifth anniversary of the terrorist attacks against the United States and, specifically, against the World Trade Center in my district on September 11, 2001.

The attacks were unprovoked, dastardly, and a notice to us all that we are, not at our choosing, at war. Since that day, this Congress has taken many actions in response -- some of which I agreed with, some of which I did not.

I resent the Republican leadership's inclusion in this resolution of references to controversial legislation, as if to imply that any patriotic American who was appalled at the attacks on our country and believes we must take resolute action to defend ourselves, must approve of all this legislation, and anyone who doesn't is either unpatriotic or foolish. It may be, though I do not believe it so, that all this legislation was wise and appropriate, but that is a highly debatable proposition and should not be in this resolution.

The resolution quite correctly "honors the heroic actions of first responders, law enforcement personnel, state and local officials, volunteers, and others who aided the innocent victims and bravely risked their own lives and health following the September 11, 2001 attacks".

Unfortunately, unless Congress acts quickly, future generations will regard this resolution as the culmination of five years of hypocrisy and betrayal. While we praise the first responders, the federal government has betrayed their trust by first lying to them and causing them to work in conditions that destroyed the health of many, and risked the lives of thousands. It has conducted a cover-up that continues to this day. It has denied the reality of the resulting illnesses, and has provided almost no help to assist with the medical and other costs imposed on thousands of first responders.

And it is not just the first responders. Many residents, school children and people who worked near Ground Zero are still suffering from the devastating environmental effects of the attacks.

In the days following the attacks, former EPA Administrator Christie Todd Whitman repeatedly declared the air safe to breathe. A federal judge found that "Whitman's deliberate and misleading statements made to the press, where she reassured the public that the air was safe to breathe around Lower Manhattan and Brooklyn, and that there would be no health risk presented to those returning to those areas, shock the conscience". The EPA Inspector General confirmed EPA's wrongdoing, and found that the White House had instructed EPA to downplay air quality concerns. For this, Whitman and anyone at the White House who was involved ought to be criminally prosecuted, and I have demanded an independent counsel look into this.

Now thousands of people are sick, and some have died, from World Trade Center contamination. Studies come out every year showing that most of the people exposed to 9/11 dust and debris suffer adverse health effects. On September 5, 2006, Mt. Sinai Medical Center released a study that found 70% of first responders suffer lung problems because of their work at Ground Zero. Information collected about the health effects on residents, people who work in the area, and school children show similar patterns.

The resolution before us today claims to honor the heroes of 9/11, but that is sheer hypocrisy if we do not, at the least, provide health care for these people as they struggle with the effects of the attacks. As Americans, let us resolve that, just as we showed exemplary valor and compassion in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, we should do the same for

those who continue to suffer the health effects of living and working in a toxic environment.

Abraham Lincoln said we must "care for him who shall have borne the battle." And so we should. We should provide comprehensive health benefits for all those who are suffering, and I suggest the easiest way to do this would be to extend Medicare benefits to those with 9/11 related illnesses who were exposed to World Trade Center dust. I have introduced such a bill, and I encourage all of my colleagues to support it and pass it without delay.

As we mark this fifth anniversary, we are still not safe. We are not safer than we were on September 11, 2001, as the resolution incorrectly states.

The President and this Congress refuse to do what we must to make us safe. We are not securing all of the nuclear material in the former Soviet Union before it is stolen or smuggled to Al Qaeda to make nuclear bombs; we are not screening all of the shipping containers coming into our ports to ensure they do not contain nuclear or biological or chemical weapons; we are not hardening our nuclear and chemical plants against sabotage that could kill tens of thousands of Americans.

Now, let me address the specific resolution before us. It is particularly dastardly. It does nothing of course to make us any safer and it does not provide needed health benefits to 9/11 first responders, but it is filled with praise for the limited and in many cases controversial actions taken by Congress since 9/11.

So, because of a cynical manipulation of the rules of the House two months before an election, the Republican leadership is using the memories of my murdered constituents to try to score cheap political points. I find this highly offensive, and I for one will not fall for it. I will not vote against the victims and heroes of 9/11 simply because you have filled the resolution with highly charged political rhetoric. This type of resolution is not the way I would have chosen to honor 9/11, a day marked by unquestioned national unity. Nevertheless, out of respect for the families of the victims and on behalf of all Americans I urge my colleagues to see past the obviously political paragraphs inserted into the resolution and come together to support passage of a resolution that should really only be known for honoring a tragic day in American history.

My thoughts and prayers, as ever, are with the families and friends of those we lost. I thank the Speaker and I yield back the balance of my time.

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